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Apotropaion and Burial in Early Byzantium: Some Preliminary Considerations¹

“Considered in relationship to early Christianity,
magic has generally received a bad press.”²

For the modern observer, it is always a source of perplexity to be faced with early Christian burials containing certain artefact types, as, for example, metal dress accessories, jewellery, combs, oil lamps, and glass and ceramic vessels, not to mention rare – or perhaps simply rarely documented – objects such as books and musical instruments. Most of these artefacts are generally, and to some extent misleadingly, referred to under the label “grave goods”. Both the label and the fact require explanation. To begin with the former, the diverging nature of the artefacts buried with the deceased must be stressed. The various earrings, finger-rings, bracelets, belt buckles, beads and combs, even as part of the funerary clothing, obviously belonged to the everyday costume of early Christian men and women (at least as far as the types are

¹ I am deeply indebted to Jean-Michel Spieser, whose magisterial lecture, “Christentum und Magie zwischen dem 4. und 7. Jahrhundert” (on 29th May 2012, Mainz) provided me with the ultimate inspiration for writing this paper. I am also very grateful to him for sending me his still unpublished study: SPIESER, J.-M.: *Christianisme et magie du III^e au VII^e siècle* (forthcoming in one of the next volumes of the *Micrologus*’ library [Firenze]). This paper is one of the first products of my research on early Byzantine mortuary practices within the framework of *WissenschaftsCampus Mainz: Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident*. I am greatly indebted to Falco Daim and the research scholarship grant provided by the *Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum*, Mainz, for enabling my research. The full list of the objects discussed in this paper, accompanied by distribution maps, will appear in the book presenting the findings of the research project (*Studies in mortuary practices in Byzantium* [working title]). Thus, I shall here only refer to the most important literature.

² AUNE, D. E.: Magic in Early Christianity. In: ANRW II.23.2. 1507.

concerned), and thus their appearance in the graves can be explained with the understandable intention of presenting a proper image of the deceased or a more ambitious intent of social display. Glass and ceramic vessels, oil lamps and books, on the other hand, can be regarded as “grave goods”, or, to put it otherwise, as funerary offerings in the narrower sense of the word if these were placed in graves during the burial ceremony. Nevertheless, some of these objects, especially ceramic and glass vessels, can equally well or even better reflect the family’s post-burial activities, e.g. commemorating meals, in the burial area. Although this short survey is hardly complete or comprehensive, it will hopefully highlight some of the difficulties arising during the search for an appropriate explanation for the presence of these so-called “grave goods”.

This task is even more complex in view of a class of artefacts which, at first glance, may be classified as ordinary jewellery items – however, they were originally manufactured and worn with an apparent magical intent.³ Circular and oval glass and metal pendants, finger-rings, armbands, small bells, tubular amulet cases and pierced coins are, amongst others, all familiar artefact types in late Roman and early Byzantine graves and tombs. Their archaeological contexts are often unclear owing to the ancient Eastern Mediterranean custom of burying more than one individual in one grave pit, sarcophagus or *arcosolium*, as well as to modern archaeologists’ general negligence in documenting the precise position of these “insignificant” minor objects. Nonetheless, their very presence in early Byzantine burials begs an in-depth investigation.

Doubly so, in the light of the first Christian texts dealing with these personal “amulets”. Writing around 200 AD, Clement of Alexandria, in his oft-quoted *Paedagogus*, acknowledges the practical necessity of possessing and

³ The label “magic” is a frequently occurring, but ill-defined term in early Christian and Byzantine contexts (for an attempt at a definition, see AUNE (n. 2)). As TUERK, J.: An early Byzantine inscribed amulet and its narratives. *BMGS* 23 (1999) 28. has aptly noted, “*The term ‘magical’, however, lacking a clear definition, is not explanatory, but needs explaining.*” Therefore, I shall here disregard a theoretical discussion of this problem and concentrate rather on the phenomenon itself. I follow the classification according to which the use of apotropaic devices belongs to the category of “white magic”. For the various types of Christian “magic”, see VON DOBSCHÜTZ, E.: *Charms and Amulets (Christian)*. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. III. New York 1958⁴. 413–430. For early Byzantine apotropaic amulets in general, see VAKALOUDI, A. D.: ΔΕΙΣΙΔΙΑΜΟΝΙΑ and the Role of the Apotropaic Magic Amulets in the Early Byzantine Period. *Byzantium* 70 (2000) 182–210; VAKALOUDI, A. D.: The Kinds and the Special Function of the epōdai (epodes) in Apotropaic Amulets of the First Byzantine Period. *BSL* 59 (1998) 222–238.

using finger-rings for sealing household objects in order to protect them from thieves and to transact public business. It is also clear from his words that the proper symbolism of these rings was hardly insignificant from a Christian perspective. As he puts it,

“Let the seals be of a dove or fish or ship in full sail or of a musical lyre, [...] or of a ship’s anchor [...]; or, if anyone be a fisherman, let him make an image of the Apostles and of the children drawn out of the water. No representation of an idol may be impressed on the ring, nor may a sword or bow, for we cultivate peace, nor a drinking cup, for we practice temperance. Many of the more sensual have their loves or their mistresses engraved on their seals, as if, by this indelible memorial of their passion, they wish to be made unable to forget their erotic passion.”⁴

The first point which may catch our attention in his text is that while Clement alludes only to the practical purposes of these rings, the recommended images themselves were part of the well-known second- to third-century pagan imagery for which a proper Christian reinterpretation could be easily given. Nevertheless, it is also obvious that some of the images displayed on these gems were probably believed to be vested with protective powers among both polytheists and their Christian contemporaries. Since Clement remains silent on this point, we cannot claim with any measure of certainty whether he agreed with or rejected this idea. Only half a century later, around the middle of the third century does a new, distinctively Christian gem type appear. Even though the shape and material, and sometimes even the imagery of these gems were largely identical with those produced by the same craftsmen for contemporary polytheists, their engraved inscriptions clearly distinguish them from the latter.⁵ In many cases, the name of Jesus is invoked by the carvers of these Christian gems, a phenomenon hardly unusual among early Christians.⁶ Belief in the power of Jesus’ name was so strong that Clement’s younger contemporary and fellow Alexandrian, Origen argued that

⁴ Clem. Al. Paed. III,59–60. The translation follows S. P. Wood (tr.): Clemet of Alexandria: *Christ the Educator*. (The Fathers of the Church 23) Washington 1953. 246. For a slightly different translation, as well as a commentary, see SPIER, J.: *Late Antique and Early Christian Gems* (Spätantike – Frühes Christentum – Byzanz, Reihe B.20) Wiesbaden 2007. 15. and note 27, with the earlier literature.

⁵ For these early Christian gems, see SPIER (n. 4).

⁶ This practice has been analysed in detail by AUNE (n. 2); for the gems themselves, see SPIER (n. 4) ch. 3.

“In fact the name of Jesus is so powerful against the daemons that sometimes it is effective even when pronounced by bad men.”

This kind of invocation of divine names is well attested to both in polytheist and Christian magic incantations and on amulets. It is interesting to note here that in Origen’s mind not only Jesus’ name was a powerful magical implement, but, as he put it,

“If by a special study we could show the nature of powerful names, some of which are used by the Egyptian wise men, or the learned men among the Persian magi, or the Brahmins, or Samanaeans among the Indian philosophers, and so on according to each nation, and if we could establish that the so-called magic is not, as the followers of Epicurus and Aristotle think, utterly incoherent, but, as the experts in these things prove, is a consistent system, which have principles known to very few; then we would say that the name Sabaoth, and Adonai, and all the other names that have been handed down by the Hebrews with great reverence, are not concerned with ordinary created things, but with a certain mysterious divine science that is related to the Creator of the universe. It is for this reason that when these names are pronounced in a particular sequence which is natural to them, they can be employed for certain purposes; and so also with other names in use in Egyptian which invoke certain daemons who have power only to do particular things; and other names in Persian which invoke other powers, and so on with each nation.”⁸

It is evident from the longer quotation above that Origen considers polytheist and Christian magic not only effective, but even a proper Christian way of conquering demons, if Biblical names and, above all, if Jesus’ name is invoked.⁹ And he was hardly alone with these views. The broader age of Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, written around 248-249, in the midst of the third-century crisis, saw a dramatic rise in the manufacture and wearing of amulets and other magical devices, as attested to also in the archaeological record.¹⁰ These objects have not only survived the chaotic third century, but they also

⁷ Origen *Cels.* I,6, the translation is from H. CHADWICK (tr.): Origen: *Contra Celsum*. Cambridge 1965. 10.

⁸ Origen *Cels.* I,24. tr.: CHADWICK (n. 7) 23-24.

⁹ For Origen, see SPIESER (n. 1).

¹⁰ BONNER, C.: Magic Amulets. *HThR* 39 (1946) 25-54; BONNER, C.: *Studies in Magical Amulets Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian*. (University of Michigan Studies: Humanistic Series 49) Ann Arbor 1950.

managed to escape the harsh attacks of the Christian authorities. The attitude of the Church Fathers turned overtly hostile only during the last decades of the fourth and the first decades of the fifth century.¹¹ In Antioch, St. John Chrysostom thunders against those Christians who attend synagogues,

“[...] fast on the same day as the Jews, and keep the Sabbaths in the same manner [...]. And why do I speak of Jews – he asks – seeing that many Gentile customs are observed by some among us; omens, auguries, presages, distinctions of days, a curious attention to the circumstances of their children’s birth, and, as soon as they are born, tablets with impious inscriptions are placed upon their unhappy heads [...]”¹²

In another of his homilies, John reels off the apparent signs of his folk’s infidelity:

“For the death of a child thou turnest all upside down! I omit other things that might make us weep; your auguries, your omens, your superstitious observances, your casting of nativities, your signs, your amulets, your divinations, your magic arts. These are crying sins, enough to provoke the anger of God [...].”¹³

When one sees these severe attacks, the question of how to avoid the egregious sins caused by amulets and magic arts may rightly arise. The answer proposed by Chrysostom is as follows:

“Art thou one of the faithful? – he asks – sign the cross; say, this I have for my own weapon, this for my remedy; and other I know none.”¹⁴

At first sight, the difference between the attitudes to magical practices as expressed by Origen in the middle of the third century and by John Chrysostom at the close of the fourth century could hardly be more contrasting. In reality,

¹¹ For the whole process, see SPIESER (n. 1).

¹² *Hom. 1 in Gal.*, tr.: ALEXANDER, G.: NPNF XIII. 8. For John’s homilies against the Jews, see WILKEN, R. L.: *John Chrysostom and the Jews. Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*. Los Angeles 1983, and esp. 83–88. (on Christians and Jewish magic); cf. also KINZIG, W.: ‘Non-separation’: Closeness and co-operation between Jews and Christians in the fourth century. *VChr* 45 (1999) 27–53; FONROBERT, C. E.: Jewish Christians, Judaizers and Christian Anti-Judaism. In: BURRUS, V. (ed.): *Late ancient Christianity*. (A people’s history of Christianity 2) Minneapolis 2005. 234–254.

¹³ *Hom. 8 in Tim.*, tr.: SCHAFF, PH.: NPNF XIII. 440.

¹⁴ *Hom. 8 in Col.*, tr.: BROADUS, J. A.: NPNF XIII. 298; for a similar argument, see his *Hom. 56. in Matth.*: NPNF X. 335; *Hom. Jud. 8.7*: HARKINS, P. W. (tr.): *Saint John Chrysostom, Discourses against Judaizing Christians*. Washington 1977. 237.

however, Chrysostom does not deny the effectiveness of amulets and magic arts in general. This is quite apparent when he preaches about a Christian woman:

“[...] is her child sick? She hath made no amulets. It is counted to her as martyrdom, for she sacrifices her son in her resolve. [...] she chose rather to see her child dead, than to put up with idolatry.”¹⁵

Amulets are therefore not ineffective against sicknesses and other harms – generally thought to be caused by demons acting through the evil eye¹⁶ –, but they are idolatrous. Similar arguments dominate the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo¹⁷ and St. Jerome¹⁸ in the West, and of Eusebius of Alexandria in the East.¹⁹ Even though Christians who invoke Jesus’ name merely to strengthen the effectiveness of their amulets are actually pagans in Augustine’s judgement, he does not doubt the amulets’ effectiveness. In agreement with Chrysostom and Eusebius of Alexandria, the cross appears as the only legal Christian apotropaic device in Augustine’s writings, too.²⁰

But what did these hateful little amulets, so severely attacked by the Fathers of the late fourth/early fifth century, look like? Chrysostom speaks about “*women and little children [who] suspend Gospels from their necks as a powerful amulet*”,²¹ while other Christians “*encircle their heads and feet with golden*

¹⁵ *Hom. 8 in Col.*, tr.: BROADUS, J. A.: NPNF XIII. 298.

¹⁶ For this concept, see DICKIE, M. W.: The Fathers of the Church and Evil Eye. In: MAGUIRE, H. (ed.): *Byzantine Magic*. Washington 1995. 9–34; ENGEMANN, J.: Zur Verbreitung magischer Übelabwehr in der nichtchristlichen und christlichen Spätantike. *JbAC* 18 (1975) 22–48; VAKALOUDI (n. 3); for the Christian re-interpretation of the ancient concept, see BROWN, P.: *Sorcery, Demons, and the Rise of Christianity from Late Antiquity into the Middle Ages*. In: DOUGLAS, M. (ed.): *Witchcraft, Confessions and Accusations*. London 1970. 17–45, esp. 27–33.

¹⁷ For St. Augustine’s views on magic see also SPIESER (n. 1); GRAF, F.: Augustine and Magic. In: BREMMER, J. N. – VEENSTRA, J. R. (eds): *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*. Leuven 2002. 87–103; MARKUS, R. A.: Augustine on magic: A neglected semiotic theory. *REAug* 40 (1994) 375–388.

¹⁸ *Com. Gal. III. on Gal. 5,19–21*, tr.: CAIN, A. (tr.): St. Jerome: *Commentary on Galatians*. (The Fathers of the Church 121) Washington 2010. 229.

¹⁹ DICKIE (n. 16).

²⁰ *Tract. Iohannes 7,6*, tr.: RETTING, J. W. (tr.): St. Augustine: *Tractates on the Gospel of John 1–10*. (The Fathers of the Church 78) Washington 1988. 160; for Eusebius of Alexandria: DICKIE (n. 16) 29, for a broader perspective, see SPIESER (n. 1).

²¹ *Hom. 19,14 de Stat.*, tr.: STEPHENS, W. R. W.: NPNF IX. 470. St. Jerome also knew of this custom, cf. his *Com. in Matth. 23* (for an English translation, see TH. P. SCHEK’S text, in *The Fathers of the Church* No. 113. Washington 2008. 260). These miniature codices containing scriptural texts

coins of Alexander of Macedon", thereby "place[ing] our hopes of salvation on an image of a Greek king."²² The explicit mention of gold coins clearly shows that the preacher's audience belonged to the elite families and the well-to-do of Antioch.²³ One of John's previously quoted catalogues of sins refers to a certainly more widespread practice, involving the placement of "tablets with impious inscriptions" upon the heads of newborn children. A few decades earlier, Ephraim the Syrian also rebuked the Syriac-speaking Christians for fabricating apotropaic and cursing tablets;²⁴ nevertheless, in our case, the apotropaic tablets are more interesting. A fairly high number of these inscribed tablets appear in the archaeological record. Most of them were rolled up and inserted into tubular cases to be suspended around the wearer's neck.²⁵ While roughly and elaborately made cases are both known, the latter class dominates the specimens known from documented mortuary contexts.²⁶ The first examples of these tubular cases date back to Graeco-Roman antiquity,²⁷ while the latest graves of the Byzantine world containing these

are well-known phenomena in the archaeological record, see GAMBLE, H. Y.: *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. New Haven – London 1995. 235–237; for a list and content of late antique miniature papyrus and parchment codices, see TURNER, E. G.: *The Typology of the Early Codex*. Philadelphia, Penn. 1977. 22. 29–30.

²² *Illum. Catch. II,5*, tr.: STEPHENS, W. R. W.: NPNF IX. 170–171.

²³ As convincingly argued in other contexts by MACMULLEN, R.: *The Second Church. Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400*. Atlanta 2009. 12–22.

²⁴ VAKALOUDI, A. D.: Religion and Magic in Syria and Wider Orient in the Early Byzantine Period. *ByzF* 26 (2000) 260. For a brief overview of cursing tablets with the earlier literature, see KLAUSER, ED.: RAC VIII. 1972. 1–24. s.v. *Fluchtafel*.

²⁵ A series of them were collected and analysed by KOTANSKY, R.: *Greek Magical Amulets. The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper and Bronze Lamellae. Part I: Published Text of Known Provenance*. Opladen 1994. Additional published finds include JORDAN, D. R.: A Silver Phylactery at Istanbul. *ZPE* 28 (1978) 84–86; KOTANSKY, R.: A Silver Phylactery for Pain. *GMusJ* 11 (1983) 169–178; FARAOONE, CH. A. – KOTANSKY, R.: An Inscribed Gold Phylactery in Stamford, Connecticut. *ZPE* 75 (1988) 257–266; PARCA, M.: Gold *Lamellae* in the Burton Y. Berry Collection. In: CALINESCU, A. (ed.): *Ancient Jewellery and Archaeology*. Bloomington – Indianapolis 1996. 215–223; GELZER, TH. – LURJE, M. – SCHÄUBLIN, CH.: *Lamella Bernesis. Ein spätantikes Goldamulett mit christlichem Exorzismus*. Stuttgart – Leipzig 1999.

²⁶ Even if the overwhelming majority of the *lamellae* are assumed to have originated from mortuary contexts, cf. KOTANSKY (n. 25) 1983. 169; FARAOONE – KOTANSKY (n. 25) 257. n. 2; GELZER – LURJE – SCHÄUBLIN (n. 25) 5, only a small number have actually been recovered from graves, e.g. GELZER – LURJE – SCHÄUBLIN (n. 25) 15. n. 44. Others have been discovered among settlement finds, cf. VLASSA, N.: O nouă plăcuță de aur gnostică de la Dierna (Ein weiteres gnostisches Goldtäfelchen aus Dierna). *ActaMusNap* 14 (1977) 205–219.

²⁷ See the somewhat sketchy, but still useful summary in SCHIENERL, P. W.: *Schmuck und Amulett in Antike und Islam*. Aachen 1988. 16–27.

artefacts belong to the seventh or even to the eighth century.²⁸ The content of the tubular cases, however, was probably not restricted to inscribed and enrolled metal sheets alone, and all inscribed metal sheets were not worn in tubular cases, either.²⁹ Considering that not all of the archaeologically documented cases contained metal plaques, it seems to me that some of these objects may originally have held inscribed papyri or linen pieces.³⁰ Furthermore, the sixth-century medical writer, Alexander of Tralles also suggested wearing tubular cases containing wolf faeces as an amulet against colic,³¹ although he also recommended the use of inscribed golden sheets enclosed in a capsule of corresponding shape against podagra.³² At the same time, later examples of these tubular cases are often, although not exclusively, attached to gold necklaces which hold pectoral crosses as well.³³

Chrysostom also refers to small “bells which are hung upon the hand” of young children in order to protect them against sickness and other demonic attacks.³⁴ These little bells, the so-called *tintinnabula*, are familiar among grave finds across the entire Eastern Mediterranean from the Roman period to the early Byzantine era.³⁵

The short list of amulets mentioned by Chrysostom in his homilies is far from complete. He must have been aware of the small stamped glass amulets, known from almost every major fourth- to fifth-century Near Eastern

²⁸ For a comprehensive list of the tubular cases, see GIAGAKI, A.: *Ta khrysa phylakta*. In: THEMELIS, P. G. (ed.): *Prōtovyzantini Eleutherina*. I. Athena 2004. 185–204. The same type remained in use across the Islamic world until today, cf. SCHIENERL (n. 27) 27–28.

²⁹ Cf. GELZER – LURJE – SCHÄUBLIN (n. 25) 6–7. n. 11; 25–26. n. 72.

³⁰ While the late antique magical papyri are exceptionally well known, linen pieces bearing magical texts are more sparsely documented in the material record. For a published example, see DANIEL, R.: Two Love-Charms. *ZPE* 19 (1975) 255–264. Taf. IVb.

³¹ Alexander of Tralles: *Twelve Books on Medicine VIII*,2, for the Greek text and its German translation, see PUSCHMANN, TH.: *Alexander von Tralles, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Medicin*. II. Amsterdam 1963³. 374–375.

³² ALEXANDER OF TRALLES: *Twelve Books on Medicine XII*; for the Greek text and its German translation, see PUSCHMANN (n. 31) 582–583.

³³ E.g. the gold necklace in Dumbarton Oaks: ROSS, M. C.: *Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection II: Jewelry, Enamels, and Art of the Migration Period*. Washington 1965. Pl. XII; and that of the Berry Collection: PARCA (n. 25), for a colour photo: KALAVREZOU, I. (ed.): *Byzantine Women and Their World*. Cambridge 2003. 295. Cat. No. 176.

³⁴ St. John Chrysostom: *Hom. 12.13 in Cor. I. tr.*: CHAMBERS, T. W.: *NPNF XII*. 71.

³⁵ For a brief overview of the *tintinnabula*, see RUSSEL, J.: The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period. In: MAGUIRE (n. 16) 4243. The number of grave finds containing *tintinnabula* is too enormous to be listed here.

archaeological site,³⁶ produced in large quantities in the Syro-Palestinian area and in all probability in Antioch itself.³⁷ Perhaps he was reluctant to mention them because they must have been popular among the lower classes owing to their fairly low price, while the majority of John's audience was anything but poor. Most of these glass pendants bear pagan symbols such as frogs or lions with stars, although in some cases an obviously Christian imagery appears on them.³⁸ Oval amulets of sheet metal bearing Hebrew names and a depiction of the Holy Rider spearing a female demon also occur commonly in early Byzantine graves.³⁹ The class emerged sometime in the fifth century⁴⁰ and its main distribution area extends from Eastern Anatolia to Egypt. The same image of the Holy Rider occasionally occurs on fifth- to seventh-century finger-rings and armbands, too.⁴¹ However, contemporary

³⁶ A great number of such amulets, originating mostly from burial contexts in modern Israel, were collected by HIRSCHFELD, Y. – PELEG, O.: A Glass Pendant from Tiberias. *IEJ* 56 (2006) 201–208. Further stray finds, preserved mostly in various Israeli collections, are referred to in the same study. The overwhelming majority of the Syrian examples are likewise stray finds, cf. ZOUHDI, B.: Médaillons "pendentifs" en verre du Musée National de Damas. In: *Annales du 7^e Congrès International d'Étude Historique du Verre, Berlin-Leipzig, 15–21 août 1977*. Liège 1978. 51–65. The same amulets also came into use in the Balkans, although finds of this type show a concentration in the coastal regions, cf. CAMBI, N.: Neki kasoantički predmeti od stakla s figuralnim prikazima u Arheološkom Muzeju u Splitu (Certain objects de verre de la basse antiquité avec représentations figurative au Musée Archéologique de Split). *Archeološki Vestnik* 25 (1974) 139–157; GESZTHELYI, T.: Késő antik üvegkáméö függők (Spätromische Glasanhänger). *Balácaj Közlemények* 6 (2001) 231–240.

³⁷ Regarding the region of their manufacture, I follow BARAG, D.: Stamped Pendants. In: SPEAR, M.: *Ancient Glass in the Israel Museum: Beads and Other Small Objects*. Jerusalem 2001. 175–176. One intriguing point is that even if these amulets were produced in large quantities in Syria and Palestine, their broad distribution perhaps suggests more than one manufacturing centre.

³⁸ The Good Shepherd: CAMBI (n. 36) Cat. Nos. 18–19, Sl. 16–17; Christ among his disciplines: CAMBI (n. 36) Cat. Nos. 20–21, Pl. I,5, *Antiquités paléochrétiennes et byzantines, III^e–XIV^e siècles. Collection de Musée d'art et d'histoire – Genève*. Milan 2011. Cat. 173; Daniel in the lion's den: ZOUDI (n. 36) 61; CROSS: SPEAR (n. 37) 181. Cat. No. 375; St. Symeon Styletes: SPEAR (n. 37) 181. Cat. No. 376.

³⁹ SPIER, J.: Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition. *JWI* 56 (1993) 25–62. quotes the most important literature in his appendix (60–62). For the identity of the "Holy Rider" and the conquered demon, see FAUTH, W.: Der christliche Reiterheilige des Sisinnios-Typs im Kampf gegen eine vielnamige Dämonin. *VChr* 53 (1999) 401–425.

⁴⁰ Although SPIER (n. 39) 61. suggests a sixth–seventh-century date for this class of amulets, the number of these artefacts dated on the strength of their archaeological contexts is so small that an earlier appearance cannot be excluded at our present state of knowledge.

⁴¹ VIKAN, G.: Two Byzantine Amuletic Armbands and the Group to which They Belong. *JWAG* 49–50 (1991–1992) 33–51. His list was complemented with new pieces by KRAUS, TH. J.: Fragmente

finger-rings were more often decorated with ancient polytheist apotropaic symbols as, for example, lions on the one hand⁴² and with the new Christian apotropaic images depicting various events of Jesus' life on the other.⁴³ The latter imagery, often including the illustration of the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Baptism in the Jordan, the Raising of Lazarus, the Crucifixion and the Ascension, spread to amuletic armbands, too.⁴⁴ Amulets depicting the Holy Rider and the ones accompanied by images from Jesus' life both regularly bear a shorter or longer citation from Psalm 90 as well.⁴⁵ These armbands were particularly popular among the inhabitants of the Syro-Palestinian region and Egypt.⁴⁶ Pierced coins represent yet another class believed to have been vested with apotropaic powers by their wearers. It is well known that images of the emperors, Jesus and the saints were widely acknowledged *apotropaions*, and therefore the coins depicting them were thought to have the same protective properties as attested to in several early to late Byzantine written accounts.⁴⁷ Their appearance in early Byzantine graves thus points to a similar direction as the purpose-made amulets mentioned above.⁴⁸

eines Amulett-Armbandes im British Museum (London) mit Septuaginta-Psalm 90 und der Huldigung der Magier. JAC 48-49. (2005-2006) 114-127.

⁴² Cf. RAHMANI, L. Y.: On Some Byzantine Brass Rings in the State Collection. *Atiquot* 17 (1985) 168-181. Cf. also BRAUN, E. – DAUPHIN, C. – HADAS, G.: A Rock-Cut Tomb at Sajur. *Atiquot* 25 (1994) Fig. 5.9; TUSHINGHAM, A. D.: The Excavations at Dibon (Dhībān) in Moab. The Third Campaign 1952-53. *Annual of the American School of Oriental Research* 40 (1972) Fig. 27.2-4.

⁴³ RAHMANI (n. 42).

⁴⁴ VIKAN (n. 41).

⁴⁵ However, an amuletic armband bearing a citation from Psalm 90, without the conventional accompanying images, is also known: ALIQUOT, J.: Une nouvelle citation du psaume 90 sur un bracelet de la région de Gabala (Jabelé). *Syria* 87 (2010) 277-279. For a list of apotropaic objects with shorter or longer citations from Psalm 90, cf. KRAUS, TH. J.: Septuaginta-Psalm 90 in apotropäischer Verwendung: Vorüberlegungen für eine kritische Edition und (bisherige) Datenmaterial. *Biblische Notizen* 125 (2005) 39-73.

⁴⁶ VIKAN (n. 41) divided the then known bracelets into a Syro-Palestinian and an Egyptian subgroup, a division that still seems to be valid.

⁴⁷ MAGUIRE, H.: Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages. *Speculum* 72 (1997) 1037-1054; MORRISON, C. – BENDALL, S.: Byzantine 'Medals': Coins, Amulets and Piety. In: SULLIVAN, D. – FISHER, E. – PAPAOANNOU, S. (eds): *Byzantine Religious Culture. Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*. (The Medieval Mediterranean 92) Leiden – Boston 2012. 217-238.

⁴⁸ Although MORRISON-BENDALL (n. 47) has claimed that pierced coins rarely appear among grave finds, this seems to be true of the gold coins only since a handful of pierced coins of lower denomination have been found in early Byzantine grave assemblages, e.g. fourth-century copper coins from Tyre: CHÉHAB, M. H.: Fouilles de Tyr IV. La nécropole: description des fouilles.

There is, however, another detail in the Church Fathers' argumentation that calls for closer attention. As we have seen, the Fathers argued that the cross is the single and most potent Christian defence and weapon against the Devil and his hateful intrigues. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that from the fifth century onwards,⁴⁹ finds of crosses make their appearance in the archaeological record, amongst others, in graves. Small golden crosses decorated with granulation and precious stone or glass inlay, silver stick crosses with glass inlay, as well as simple cast bronze crosses with dotted circle patterns are the most frequent types.⁵⁰ The custom of burying the deceased with a pendant cross, however, did not altogether supersede the older practice of providing the dead with other amulets. Bells, tubular amulet cases, finger-rings, armbands and pierced coins remain fairly regular grave finds until at least the seventh century. Knowing that the Fathers did not recommend the burial of the dead with his/her pectoral cross, it can be

Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth 34 (1986) Pl. XXIV.2; from Moza 'Illit: GUDOVITCH, Sh.: A Late Roman Burial Cave at Moza 'Illit (in Hebrew, with English summary), *'Atiqot* 29 (1996) 69*, Fig. 3; and from Giv'at Šaret: SELIGMAN, J. – ZIAS, J. – STARK, H.: Late Hellenistic and Byzantine Burial Caves at Giv'at Sharet, Beth Shemesh. *'Atiqot* 29 (1996) 55, Fig. 20.1; a reportedly seventh century coin from Ēirbet al-Dūlālat Ṣāliḥ Sārī Taqrīr awwalī 'an nata'iğ al-tanqībāt al-atariyya fi Hirbat Dūhala – al-Nu'ayma. Al-mawsim al-awwal – ṣayf 1990 m [ilādī], in: [Report on the Results of the Excavations at Khirbet Doaleh-al-N'aymeh: First Season, Summer 1990] *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 25 (1990) 17*, Pl. 2d; for the Greek examples (fourth and sixth century), see LASKARIS, N. G.: *Monuments funéraires paléochrétiens (et byzantins) en Grèce*. Athénées 2000. 323. It must also be noted that the number of unpierced coins clearly exceeds that of the pierced specimens. Although these unpierced pieces, often found on/in the deceased's skull or in his/her hands, but sometimes also by other areas of the body, are generally interpreted as Kharon's obol, their presence can probably also be explained by the apotropaic power attributed to the images displayed on them, especially in cases when they were not deposited in the region of the skull or the hands.

⁴⁹ It is interesting to note here that albeit literary sources record the wearing of pectoral crosses already during the fourth century (cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Macrina* 30), these artefacts do not seem to occur in the archaeological record before the fifth century. For an early attempt to understand and reconstruct Macrina's cross, see DÖLGER, F.: Das Anhängerkreuzchen der hl. Makrina und ihr Ring mit Kreuzpartikel. Ein Beitrag zur religiösen Volkskunde des 4. Jahrhunderts nach der Vita Macrinae des Gregor von Nyssa. *Antike und Christentum* 3 (1932) 81–116.

⁵⁰ This is not the place to systematically review the cross finds originating from mortuary contexts. However, a fairly good impression of the main types can be gained from the finds of the Tyre necropolis, cf. CHÉHAB (n. 48) Pl. XLII–XLII. A comprehensive catalogue of the cross finds excavated in present-day Greece, unfortunately without any reference to the cross types, is given by LASKARIS (n. 48) 316–317. For another, slightly outdated overview, without a clear specification of the displayed artefacts' chronology, see DÖLGER (n. 49).

argued that in the minds of everyday Christians, this latter costume may have corresponded to their ancient habit of protecting and caring for their loved ones also by means of amulets in their life after death.⁵¹

The idea of using apotropaic devices in order to safeguard somebody after his/her death may sound strange at first. However, the polytheists of the ancient Mediterranean and early Christian communities both believed in some sort of life after earthly death.⁵² In the ancient Greek thought-world, the dead not only had to pay a fee to Kharon for ferrying them across the river Styx, but the deceased residing in Hades had to be fed by their still living relatives. The fate of the deceased's soul was to some extent similar in early Christianity. The early Fathers often speak about the struggle of angels and demons over the dying human in order to acquire the departed's soul. After separation from the body, the soul, accompanied and led by an angel,⁵³ has to make a shorter or longer journey before arriving in Heaven or an interim "place",⁵⁴ or, more adequately put, an "interim state" labelled Hades or Sheol. This interim state is the "place" where the majority of the souls (except for the souls of the martyrs and saints, who in most Fathers' views go directly to Paradise) wait between earthly death and the last judgement and resurrection.⁵⁵ While the exact conditions of the interim state and the souls'

⁵¹ Even if this custom was not equally popular in earlier times in various provinces of the Roman Empire. In Late Roman Palestine, small bells are recurring objects in several burials; cf. VITTO, F.: An Early Byzantine-Period Burial Cave at Kabul. *'Atiqot* 66 (2011) 122–123. In Roman Egypt, on the other hand, amulets appear only infrequently among grave finds, cf. DUNAND, F. – LICHTENBERG, R.: *Pratiques et croyances funéraires en Egypte romain.* ANRWII.18.5 3294–3295. At the same time, apotropaic images and inscriptions frequently occur on the walls of Egyptian tombs, cf. KAPLAN, I.: *Grabmalerei und Grabreliefs der Römerzeit: Wechselwirkung zwischen der ägyptischen und griechisch-alexandrinischen Kunst.* (Beiträge zur Ägyptologie 16) Wien 1999.

⁵² For the Roman concepts, CUMONT, F.: *After Life in Roman Paganism.* New Haven 1923. remain fundamental; for the Jewish beliefs, see the essays in AVERY-PECK, A. J. – NEUSNER, J. (eds): *Judaism in Late Antiquity IV: Death, Life-After-Death, Resurrection and the World-to-Come in the Judaism of Antiquity.* Leiden – Boston – Köln 2000, while for the early Christians' views, see DALEY, B.: *The Hope of the Early Church.* Grand Rapids 2010².

⁵³ Cf. REICHEIS, A.: *Engel, Tod und Seelenreise. Das Wirken der Geister beim Heimgang des Menschen in der Lehre der alexandrinischen und kappadokischen Väter.* (Temi e testi 4) Roma 1958; DALEY (n. 52).

⁵⁴ For the exact nature of this interim state, cf. MERKT, A.: *Das Fegefeuer: Entstehung und Funktion einer Idee.* Darmstadt 2005. 102. n. 203.

⁵⁵ DALEY (n. 52). A collection of the anti-Nicene texts may be found in BERCOVITZ, D. W. (ed.): *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs.* Hendrickson 1998. 191–197. STUIBER, A.: *Refrigerium interim: die Vorstellungen zum Zwischenzustand und die frühchristlichen Grabskulpturen.* (Theophaneia 11) Bonn

journey are not strictly identically described by all the Fathers and in the grave inscriptions,⁵⁶ it is clear from the written and archaeological evidence that everyday Christians throughout the late antique Mediterranean felt the need of feeding and caring for their entombed deceased. Moreover, commemorative meals involving libations and nourishing of the dead seem to play a particularly prominent role among the mortuary practices of ordinary early Christian families.⁵⁷

Obviously, we cannot be certain that these amulets, crosses and other apotropaic devices were deposited in the grave with the sole purpose of protecting the deceased on their journey to Hades and during their sojourn there or, in the case of Christians, during the soul's descent to Hades/Sheol and its long wait in the interim state.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in the Church Fathers' narrative, prayers for the departed relatives' souls, alms-giving and the Eucharist are all important means of support for the souls suffering, purging or simply waiting in Hades/Sheol before the Resurrection. It seems to me that the above enumerated apotropaic devices buried with the dead may also have served the same purpose in the minds of those Christians who were not wholly satisfied with the "official" solution offered and propagated by the Church.⁵⁹ However, it is equally possible that the amulets were also intended to protect the earthly remains of the deceased, although the period's views on the resurrection of the flesh diverged significantly.

1957. analysed the most important early written testimonies and attempted to re-interpret early Christian funerary art based on his conclusions from examining texts. Some of his over-interpretations were convincingly challenged by DE BRUYNE, L.: *Refrigerium interim*, RAC 34 (1958) 87–118. For the present state of our knowledge, see DRESKEN-WEILAND, J.: *Bild, Grab und Wort. Untersuchungen zu Jenseitsvorstellungen von Christen des 3. und 4. Jahrhunderts*. Regensburg 2010, and MERKT (n. 54). For the contemporary Orthodox understanding, see KARMIRIS, J. N.: *Abriss der dogmatischen Lehre der Orthodoxen Katholische Kirche*. In: BRATSIOTIS, P. (ed.): *Die Orthodoxe Kirche in griechischer Sicht*. I. Stuttgart 1959, 112–117.

⁵⁶ While, e.g., for the Syrian writers (Aphrrophat, St. Ephraim, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Narsai) Sheol is an inactive "sleep", cf. DALEY (n. 52) 72–76; 111; 174; for the writings of Aphrrophat and St. Ephraim, see also MÖLLERS, H.: *Jenseitsglaube und Totenkult im alchristlichen Syrien, nach den Schriften unter dem Namen Afrem des Syren*. Marburg 1965; in the view of most Greek and Latin Fathers, it is more a place of purgation and suffering.

⁵⁷ A good summary of the archaeological and written evidence can be found in MACMULLAN (n. 23) and REBILLARD, E.: *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*. Ithaca 2009.

⁵⁸ A similar intent behind accompanying the dead with *apotropaions* has been observed in other, non-Mediterranean contexts, too, cf. VAN GENNEP, A.: *The Rites of Passage*. London 1960, 143–154.

⁵⁹ And as REBILLARD (n. 57) 140–175, has convincingly argued, many Christians were probably dissatisfied with the solution proposed by the Church.

Moreover, not all the representatives of the Church were on the same side of the divide. Canon 36 of the fourth-century Council of Laodicea, for instance, prohibited the members of both the lower and the higher clergy to fabricate amulets or to act as sorcerers, magi, mathematicians and astrologers.⁶⁰ And such deviations were hardly unique. In 449, at the Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus, the Syrian bishop Sophronios of Tellā was accused of practising almost every kind of magical art.⁶¹ It is perhaps clear from the above-cited examples, as well as from several contemporary and later accounts of the warnings and prohibitions issued by the “official” Church, that it cannot have been an easy task for ordinary lay Christians to decide whether a certain rite – in our case, one of the then current funerary rites – was regarded as tolerable or intolerable “magic” by “official” Church authorities. Moreover, the apotropaic, or, in other words, “magical” intent in certain burial rites was not confined to “popular Christianity”. Let me quote here but a single eloquent example. Living on the southern fringes of the medieval Christian *oikumene* at the beginning of the twelfth century, Archbishop Georgius of Dongola let his burial vault be adorned with four Greek and Coptic inscriptions. As J. van der Vliet’s rigorous analysis has demonstrated, the texts, which are longer citations from the so-called “Prayer of Mary *ad Bartos*” and from the homilies of Ps.-Cyril of Jerusalem and Evodius of Rome, must once have constituted important parts of the medieval Coptic funerary liturgy.⁶² At the same time, the significance of their appearance in a bishop’s tomb points well beyond their being simple liturgical citations. As their examiner concludes,

⁶⁰ Ch. HEEFELÉ, J.: *Histoire des Councils d’après les documents originaux*. Paris 1907. 1018. GAMBLE (n. 21) 238, contends that one (perhaps the larger [?]) part of the miniature codices and magical papyri bearing scriptural citations can be assigned to the amulets manufactured by the clergy. For an overview of the magical use of “scriptural papyri”, see JUDGE, E. A.: The magical use of scripture in the papyri. In: CONRAD, E. W. – NEWING, E. G. (eds): *Perspectives on Language and Text. Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen’s Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985*. Winona Lake 1987. 339–349.

⁶¹ For an English translation of the acts, see HONIGMANN, E.: A Trial for Sorcery on August 22, A.D. 449. *Isis* 35 (1944) 281–284; see also the useful comments of Vakaloudi (n. 24) 271–273.

⁶² VAN DER VLIET, J.: Literature, Liturgy, Magic: A Dynamic Continuum. In: BUZI, P. – CAMPLANI, A. (eds): *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual Trends. Studies in Honor of Tito Orlandi*. (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 125) Roma 2011. 555–574. I am particularly indebted to Ágnes Mihálykó (Budapest), who drew my attention to this study.

*"The scribe John, in his colophon on the west wall of the tomb, defined this purpose of characterizing the tomb's decoration as a φυλακτήριον, an amulet or protective charm. As ritual texts, which they had become by virtue of their inclusion in the funeral liturgy, the originally narrative texts about passing away of the Virgin had come to be integrated in an amuletic, magical ensemble, a written rite de passage. In its appropriation of ritual texts (both magical and liturgical), the ensemble creates a virtual ritual that as a whole is meant to guarantee and secure the safe passage of the deceased from this world to the other."*⁶³

Although the same subtle level of allusions to churchly authenticated apotropaic means may not be often found among the apotropaic devices buried with the dead during Late Antiquity, the primordial intent behind their presence in early Byzantine grave assemblages seems to correspond to the sophisticated Christian narrative created for Bishop Georgius' final resting place. Be as it may, the explanation proposed in the above is no more than a preliminary conclusion to be tested by further investigations, even if it offers at least a partial solution and is in rough agreement with the written testimonies.

⁶³ VAN DER VLIEET (n. 62) 570-571.